UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/47/951
25 May 1993
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/FRENCH/SPANISH

Forty-seventh session
Agenda item 47

RESTRUCTURING AND REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the attached report, which was submitted to him, in accordance with paragraph 3 of Assembly resolution 47/150 of 18 December 1992, by the World Food Council.

ANNEX

Report of the World Food Council pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/150

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1 - 2	3
II.	PRINCIPAL ISSUES AND POSITIONS OF COUNCIL MEMBERS	3 - 9	3
III.	INTEGRATING THE MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL ELSEWHERE IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM	10 - 16	5
IV.	PROPOSALS IN FAVOUR OF A SPECIAL HIGH-LEVEL FORUM FOCUSING ON GLOBAL FOOD AND HUNGER PROBLEMS	17 - 27	6
V.	CONCLUSIONS	28	8

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly considered, inter alia, the future role of the World Food Council and how its mandate and functions might best be carried out within the wider context of the overall restructuring of the social and economic activities of the United Nations system. These issues had been discussed by Council members at their eighteenth ministerial session held at Nairobi in June 1992 and at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the World Food Council, held in New York in September 1992. The reports and proposals of those meetings had been submitted to the Assembly. 1/ 2/ In its resolution 47/150 of 18 December 1992, the Assembly decided:

> "to address these issues in the context of the discussions on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields at the resumed forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, and, in this context, invites the World Food Council to continue its attempts to agree on appropriate measures to be taken and to communicate any agreed conclusions to the General Assembly".

2. In response to this resolution, the Council initiated a consultative process, which included consultations between the Rome representatives of the Bureau, the establishment of a Rome-based informal working group and the referral of the group's report to all member Governments of the Council for comments and further proposals. The present report is the result of this consultative process. It is submitted to the General Assembly, in response to resolution 47/150, to facilitate the deliberations in the resumed forty-seventh session of the Assembly.

II. PRINCIPAL ISSUES AND POSITIONS OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

3. Council members are agreed on four principles that should guide the United Nations response to world food and hunger problems. They agree that:

(a) The objectives of the World Food Conference, which the Council was mandated to pursue, are at least as important in the 1990s as they were in 1974;

(b) The persistence and complexity of world food and hunger problems call for continuing high priority on the United Nations development agenda;

(c) As a manifestation of the priority accorded to food and hunger problems, these problems should be addressed at ministerial or senior levels on a regular basis;

(d) Any Council proposals for future arrangements for an effective United Nations response to hunger problems should be supportive of the overall restructuring of the social and economic activities of the United Nations system.

4. However, disagreements continue to exist concerning the most effective institutional response by the United Nations to these principles and their

realization. At the core of the institutional concerns is the question of whether an independent high-level entity solely concerned with global food and hunger issues can effectively and substantively address these issues. The two sets of proposals now on the table concerning how the Council's mandate and functions might best be carried out in the United Nations system have essentially been shaped by the basic attitude of Governments with regard to this central question.

5. A few Council members have questioned the need for an independent body like the World Food Council and have emphasized the importance of integrating hunger issues throughout the United Nations system in a meaningful fashion so that they receive the attention they deserve. There is no disagreement with the idea of integrating hunger issues throughout the United Nations system, but most members believe that such a system-wide integration requires a special forum devoted to policy formulation and coordination, detached from operational responsibilities and standing above sectorial interests. For many countries, the Council - reformed or reconstituted to improve its effectiveness - continues to represent such a forum; others do not preclude the search for, or creation of an alternative body, as long as it would meet the criteria of non-operationality and multisectoriality.

6. It is important to note that both those advocating a fundamental rethinking of how best to deal with the critical issues falling within the mandate of the Council and those in favour of a reformed Council or equivalent independent body have emphasized the multisectorial nature of global hunger problems and the desirability of broader ministerial participation from different sectors in any future institutional arrangements in the United Nations system. Similarly, the importance of participation from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and others has been stressed. The various proposals made to date need to be examined against these criteria.

7. In this connection, one country pointed out that there is an increasingly close relationship between food security issues and other urgent policy matters on the world agenda such as peace-keeping and humanitarian emergencies. This essential relationship requires participation by a wide range of organs and agencies of the United Nations system, together with a host of non-governmental organizations. Similarly, addressing these policy challenges transcends the usual attention of ministers of agriculture and ministers of development, calling for involvement of ministers of foreign affairs, finance, humanitarian affairs and defence as participants in food policy decisions, which so frequently arise out of regional conflicts and natural catastrophes. Therefore, some countries expressed concern that the World Food Council, or any successor body in Rome, would of necessity remain marginal as far as emergency food security issues of the international community are concerned.

8. A related question is the location of the primary decision-making centre for world food and hunger issues in the United Nations system. Some countries see the real decision-making and political pressure point for food security in the broader developmental and political context to be in New York; for others it is Rome, or possibly Geneva. There are likely to be certain tradeoffs between the kind of institutional arrangements to be put in place eventually and the location of the decision-making point for food security.

9. It is evident that the consultative process in response to resolution 47/150 has not led to consensus among Council members, with the basic positions remaining by and large as they were presented to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the World Food Council. The search for appropriate arrangements has to continue. Some members favour a continuation of these efforts within the Council, through some kind of ad hoc committee and/or a carefully prepared ministerial session, with the results possibly to be considered by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session. Others prefer the General Assembly to deal with the matter at the current resumed forty-seventh session. However, the consultations have been useful in clarifying and further developing existing positions, flagging new opportunities and raising pertinent questions. The following summary of positions of member countries and of issues raised in the consultative process is intended to make a constructive contribution to the further deliberations.

III. INTEGRATING THE MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL ELSEWHERE IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

10. Those Council members who are dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the existing high-level independent body propose a transfer of the Council's mandate and functions to the Economic and Social Council, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination. There are some differences in terms of the respective roles to be assigned to the Economic and Social Council and FAO, which are linked to different perceptions of the location of the decision-making point for food and hunger issues. At the same time, there seems to be flexibility among those who propose a rethinking of the World Food Council with regard to the distribution of responsibilities between these two bodies.

11. The proposals that focus on the Economic and Social Council envisage a major role for a revitalized Economic and Social Council in policy leadership and coordination, including the suggestion of biennial meetings of both ministers of agriculture and ministers for development or their representatives in the Economic and Social Council. The proposals that focus on FAO include:

(a) The absorption of the World Food Council's "policy forum" functions by FAO, possibly to be combined in future with the function of cross-sectorial coordination and setting of priorities by an international development council, whose functions might initially be exercised by the Economic and Social Council;

(b) A one-day meeting of Ministers of Agriculture on food security issues to be held within the framework of the biennial FAO Conference and to be prepared largely by the FAO secretariat, possibly with inputs from the Committee on Food Security, with the Economic and Social Council assuming the function of integrating food security issues into broader development policies and ensuring effective implementation of operational decisions.

12. All the proposals that focus on the Economic and Social Council emphasize the role of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in operational coordination, possibly involving a special subcommittee such as the Subcommittee on Nutrition.

13. Concerning policy leadership, one proposal would also envisage a primary role for the General Assembly.

14. During the informal consultations, a number of complementary ideas for maintaining a high profile for food and hunger issues were aired. They included the possibility of special ministerial sessions within the framework of FAO, special meetings in New York of eminent persons attending the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council or its subsidiary organs and possibly an elevation in the status of the Committee on Food Security. Additional efforts to explore alternative or complementary ways of institutionalizing high-level attention to food and hunger issues of the kind mandated to the World Food Council could be useful.

15. The proposals for transferring the Council's mandate and functions elsewhere in the United Nations system are a manifestation of the search for the most effective institutional arrangements for solving food and hunger problems in a changing world and a changing United Nations. Naturally, they also open up a number of questions concerning their feasibility, especially among those favouring a continuing role for a specialized forum.

16. With regard to the proposals that focus on the Economic and Social Council, questions have been raised as to whether the complex development agenda of the Economic and Social Council would permit adequate, in-depth attention to world hunger problems and related policy leadership on a regular basis and whether ministers of agriculture and ministers for development could be expected to meet regularly in the Economic and Social Council. With regard to proposals that focus on FAO, concerns have been raised about the possibility of sectorial and operational constraints to multisectorial policy formulation and coordination. There have been questions about the potential results to be obtained from one-day ministerial meetings on food security at the biennial FAO Conference. These questions are legitimate, but they should be addressed open-mindedly, without prejudice, in the true spirit of searching for innovative solutions.

IV. PROPOSALS IN FAVOUR OF A SPECIAL HIGH-LEVEL FORUM FOCUSING ON GLOBAL FOOD AND HUNGER PROBLEMS

17. As noted above, most World Food Council members see the continuing need for a special high-level entity responsible for policy formulation and coordination in response to global food and hunger problems, standing above sectorial interests and operational responsibilities. Most countries sharing this view believe that the Council's effectiveness can be improved in a major way through:

(a) A substantially new approach to the Council's functioning;

(b) A streamlining of its ministerial sessions;

(c) Other measures, including broadened participation in the work of the Council, closer interaction with other United Nations bodies, and a sharper focus in the Council's mandate.

18. The crux of a more effective Council lies in a substantially new approach to its functioning with regard to the quality and uniqueness in the United

Nations system of its ministerial sessions and to their preparation and follow-up. Many of the Council's founders had in mind a policy forum which would be more informal and innovative than established intergovernmental machinery. In order to turn the Council into such a forum, its sessions would need to be prepared in a fundamentally different way. A key element would be an intensive inter-sessional consultative process to prepare policy issues for ministers and monitor implementation of Council recommendations. Various proposals have been made for facilitating such a process. They include the establishment of an inter-sessional committee of ministers' representatives and experts, regional consultations, and the adoption of an approach that requires in-depth preparations of ministerial sessions such as is used for the summit meetings of the group of seven major industrialized countries (G-7) and the group of fifteen developing countries (G-15).

19. A new approach to the Council's functioning would contribute significantly to the streamlining of ministerial sessions. There is broad-based agreement among those favouring a continuation of the Council to shorten the duration of ministerial sessions, focus their agendas more sharply and make more forceful and monitorable recommendations and directives. Also, ministerial sessions should be biennialized and held at a fixed rather than rotating venue, most likely at Rome as favoured by many members. Some members propose back-to-back meetings with the biennial FAO Conference. Others advocate meetings in the intervening years, with the possibility of an extraordinary session to be convened during the FAO Conference.

20. As part of other reform proposals, the issue of broadened ministerial participation beyond ministers of agriculture, involving ministers from such fields as trade, finance, development and humanitarian affairs, or, broadly speaking, ministers of competence for food security, was discussed.

21. Council members advocating a reformed Council are unanimous in their insistence on much closer cooperation and interaction of the Council with other bodies of the United Nations system, notably the Rome-based food agencies. Among various opportunities, agency heads should be requested to report to the Council on a regular basis and to have their representatives participate in the Council's inter-sessional consultative process. It was also suggested to make the heads of the agencies with a major impact on global hunger members of the Council. In addition, there are opportunities for much closer interaction with the Economic and Social Council, including back-to-back sessions of the World Food Council with the high-level segments of the Economic and Social Council and a greater role of the Economic and Social Council in determining the agenda of the World Food Council.

22. There have also been calls for leaving the function of the coordination of operational activities to a revitalized Economic and Social Council and the Administrative Committee on Coordination, and focusing the mandate of the World Food Council on coordination through policy guidance and leadership.

23. World Food Council members found it difficult to discuss the most effective institutional arrangements for food and hunger problems in the framework of United Nations intergovernmental reforms as long as these are not yet fully defined. Some members also suggested that, as a precondition for effective reforms to address food and hunger problems, an in-depth assessment of the

present competence of relevant institutions in the United Nations system and of the potential for improvements was called for. It was therefore proposed that at this critical time of change the Council continue its work with greater efficiency and effectiveness until the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system shows sharper outlines, especially with regard to food security issues.

24. While many of the above proposals for Council reform could be implemented within the framework of the Council's current terms of reference and rules of procedure, some would call for major changes in these and, thus, for a reconstitution of the Council.

25. As an alternative to Council reform or reconstitution or the distribution of the Council's mandate and functions to various bodies of the United Nations system, there is the proposal for the identification of another existing or the creation of a new high-level body, which would ensure specialized and regular attention to policy formulation and coordination with regard to world hunger problems.

26. The consultations also touched on questions related to an independent secretariat servicing the Council or an equivalent forum, located at Rome or New York, and its Executive Head, with a number of members calling for the nomination of an Executive Director a.i. to head the World Food Council secretariat in this delicate phase. The issue of the 1993 ministerial session was also raised. Some of these issues were, at that time, also discussed in the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. At the time of submission of this report to the Assembly decisions will have already been taken.

27. The proposals in favour of a special high-level forum for global food and hunger problems evoke a similar set of critical questions as those raised under the set of proposals for integrating the Council's functions elsewhere in the United Nations system. The primary question is whether the above proposals are far-reaching enough to bring about true change and how feasible they are, especially those relating to a substantially new approach to the Council's functioning. There are also questions concerning the feasibility of broader ministerial participation in the Council's work. Some countries feel that no reforms - however well-intended - could turn the Council into a truly effective body at this stage. These questions, together with those raised in the preceding section, present a challenge to further deliberations.

V. CONCLUSIONS

28. Council members are agreed on a set of principles to guide the United Nations response to global food and hunger problems, but disagreements continue to exist concerning the most effective institutional response to these principles. At the heart of these disagreements is the question of whether an independent high-level body solely concerned with world food and hunger problems, standing above sectorial interests and operational responsibilities, can make an effective and substantive contribution to the search for solutions to global food security problems. While the Council cannot communicate agreed conclusions to the General Assembly, it seeks to contribute to its deliberations

through this synthesis of World Food Council member positions, as well as ideas and questions that have emerged from recent consultations. Council members are united in the search for the most effective response to world food and hunger problems.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Food Council on the work of its eighteenth session, Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 19 (A/47/19).

2/ Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the World Food Council (A/47/19/Add.1).